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British Troops Retake Island Argentina Seized

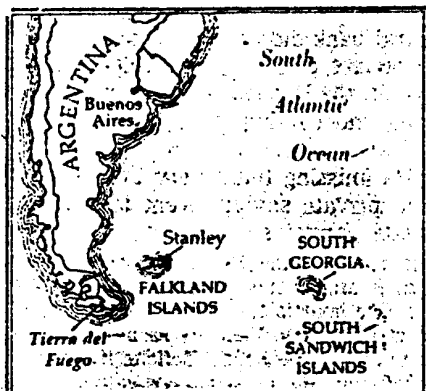
South Georgia Is Reclaimed; Argentine Sub Damaged; U.S. Doesn't Criticize

A WALL STREET JOURNAL NEWS ROUNDUP

British troops recaptured South Georgia island yesterday, intensifying the Falkland crisis from a diplomatic war of nerves to a military confrontation.

British helicopters also attacked and damaged an Argentine submarine in the area, Defense Ministry officials in London said.

In London last night, British Defense Minister John Nott said "so far no British



casualties have been reported. At present we have no information on the Argentine casualty position."

In Washington, the Reagan administration tried to keep its mediating efforts alive despite the hostilities. But the State Department didn't specifically criticize Britain or call for a halt in the fighting.

The U.S., by contrast, had publicly deplored Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands on April 2.

South Georgia, the site of yesterday's military action, is a bleak snow-covered island about 800 miles to the east of the Falklands. Its only occupants of late have been scientific researchers and a movie team.

Argentina started the crisis there—without much of the world noticing—in mid-March when a small band of Argentine scrap merchants planted the Argentine flag. The British had claimed the Falklands and South Georgia, a Falkland's dependency, since 1833.

According to the Press Association, a British news agency, yesterday's move on South Georgia was preceded by a landing last Thursday of about a dozen British marine commandos, who radioed back that Argentina had 44 men plus a mortar team defending the island.

According to the United Kingdom Defense Ministry, the British task force seeking to take South Georgia "was detected by an Argentine submarine close off the coast near the harbor. . . . Helicopters were sent to engage (the submarine) in order to safeguard our ships and the men aboard."

The ministry said the submarine, believed to be the Santa Fe, "was damaged." It didn't elaborate on the attack.

In Buenos Aires, the Argentine government said two British helicopters attacked a submarine that was unloading food and other supplies for troops and civilians engaged in dismantling an abandoned whaling station on South Georgia.

The Argentine junta called the action "a flagrant violation" of the United Nations resolution calling on both sides to end hostilities.

The Argentine government last night hadn't confirmed that the island was recaptured by the British. One Argentine communique reported a four-hour battle after which the British were said to have withdrawn. Another communique reported that at Puerto Leith, an Argentine naval unit commander said in his last message: "I am destroying my radio and I am destroying my codes. I am entering into battle. Viva la patria."

It has generally been expected that Britain would move on South Georgia first, to convince Argentina that Britain means business.

Although Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher continues to seek a diplomatic solution, her inner cabinet has expressed little enthusiasm for the latest proposals that Foreign Secretary Francis Pym brought back to London from Washington over the weekend.

In Washington, the State Department said the U.S. is still committed to finding a diplomatic settlement and will continue its efforts.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig was scheduled to meet at the State Department with Argentine Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez yesterday afternoon to discuss a new U.S. peace plan. But Argentina postponed the meeting until this morning. Mr. Haig had lengthy phone conversations with Mr. Costa Mendez during the day yesterday and emphasized that President Reagan thinks "every effort" should be made to find a peaceful solution, the State Department said.

Upon his arrival in Washington, Mr. Costa Mendez indicated his country still is willing to work for a diplomatic solution. He told reporters he doesn't think diplomacy has ended.

American officials insisted that the U.S. needs to maintain a neutral stance while talks continue. But some lawmakers are openly pushing the administration to side with Britain. Those legislators want to ensure that the Thatcher government, a close and valuable U.S. ally, doesn't suffer an embarrassing military defeat. Chairman John Tower (R., Texas) of the Senate Armed Services Committee said that if negotiations remain bogged down the U.S. "has no moral or practical option but to support Britain."

On ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley," Sen. Tower said the U.S. should consider giving Britain naval surveillance and intelligence information. He predicted that the Soviet Union will do the same for Argentina if the fighting heats up.

But he added that the U.S. should keep a "passive" role, and shouldn't use its forces directly in combat.

The attack in the South Atlantic complicates a new diplomatic problem the U.S. has to face today. Argentina has called a meeting of nations in the Organization of American States to ask them to impose sanctions on Britain. Under a 1947 hemispheric defense treaty, Argentina can ask for economic or diplomatic sanctions or for military help from treaty signatories, including the U.S.